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Schweiker — Lone GOP Maverick

By Lee Linder
Associated Press

Philadelphia

"My independence is my life-blood. I am not a Republican stereotype," says U.S. Senator Richard Schweiker, the liberal Republican for conservative Ronald Reagan says will be his running mate should Reagan win his party's presidential nomination.

"I'm not the kind of guy who can get the word from the party and vote for something that I don't believe in," the 51-year-old Schweiker says, and there are plenty of examples to prove his point:

* He was among the first of prominent Republicans to demand President Nixon's resignation because of Watergate.

* He has criticized President Ford's tax and oil policies as favoring the rich against the poor and has tended to back liberal legislation.

* He refused to support conservative Barry Goldwater in the 1964 presidential campaign.

Indeed, Schweiker's independence might be illustrated by reports from Ford sources earlier this summer that Schweiker was among those being considered by the President as a running mate.

His voting record is considered liberal.

He has been given a 100 per cent rating by the AFL-CIO's political arm, which gave Democratic vice presidential nominee Walter Mondale a 95 for the same period.

Lately the two-term Pennsylvania senator — he also served eight years in the House — has taken up a new cause that has brought him attention: Pressing for reopening of the investigation into President Kennedy's assassination.

Schweiker regards as suspect the conclusion that Kennedy was killed by Lee Harvey Oswald acting alone. He alleges there was a CIA and FBI coverup of crucial evidence.

"The Warren Commission is like a house of cards," Schweiker said of the official Kennedy findings [illegible]

conversation, has little flair for the flamboyant and is generally conservative in dress.

His penchant for independence, with the stress on liberal ideals and ideas, never made him the darling of his state's mostly conservative Republican leadership. They twice denied him the party's nomination for governor and sought unsuccessfully to dump him in primary fights for the House and Senate.

But though the GOP wasn't always enchanted by Schweiker's positions, he was able to capture the support of many Democrats, including those he opposed and beat.

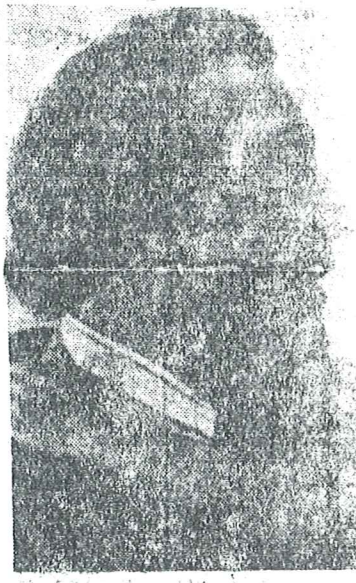
Joseph Clark, the former Philadelphia mayor whom Schweiker knocked out of the Senate in 1968, says "I couldn't have lost to a better guy" and calls him "courageous, liberal, understanding and capable." Schweiker routed Clark by 350,000 votes, while Mr. Nixon lost the state to Democrat Hubert Humphrey by almost as much.

In 1972, he became the first Republican senatorial candidate ever to win the endorsement of the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO.

Schweiker is a father of five children. He was raised as a member of the Central Schwenkfelder Church, a small Pennsylvania Dutch sect. He was valedictorian of his high school class and a member of Phi Beta Kappa honorary society at Pennsylvania State University.

After college and two years in the Navy he went to work for a tile company owned by his father, moving up from janitor to vice president, before he decided to go into politics.

Schweiker, an early Vietnam hawk, turned dove in 1965, calling for an end to the war and that became a major issue in his victory over Clark. He has supported Medicare, federal [illegible] and a massive [illegible]



Senator Schweiker held his daughter, Kristie, 6, at a [illegible] news conference yesterday

His refusal to back Goldwater in 1964 was the only time he declined to back the national ticket, noting he supported Mr. Nixon in 1972, even though he now regrets it.

"I've got to stick with my party in a presidential year," Schweiker says. "While I'm not normally a partisan, I do believe in the two-party system."

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★ First hint of this in print out here.